

No time for complacency

It's not hard to be politically neutral given the country's predicament – four political forces masquerading as two major parties, a centre ground the silent majority yearn to occupy, with no credible runner to back. Like it or not, feeling disenfranchised and populist opportunism are on the rise.

An ageing population, perhaps inhibiting a millennial world where historic attitudes can seem inward and even backward-looking, conflicts with a younger generation, who are more attuned to issues around gender, race, nationality and migration, and are challenging conventional wisdoms! Is it any wonder that so much in politics seems to be more about division rather than unity?

It is increasingly apparent that the next few years will continue to offer an unedifying spectacle as we leave one Union and then deal with the consequences within our own. But irrespective of political variables and media mischief, trains need to run, homes need to be built, roads need to be maintained and infrastructure developed.

Our day-to-day needs must be provided for regardless of the distractions and intrigue of Westminster. Sustaining and growing our £1.8 trillion annual economy has to be the overriding priority – improving productivity to allow higher wages to be paid, boosting demand and ensuring public services are

provided and improved. One might justifiably ask who is actually managing the shop while there are fights in the stockroom?

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Government needs to get a grip – and fast. There can be little comfort for anyone that a prediction of post-referendum recession never happened, given that economic growth has been declining ever since and is likely to remain anaemic for some time to come. There is a dangerous complacency that current growth rates around 1.5% are acceptable. They are not. Any growth lower than our historic average of nearer 2.5% is lost prosperity: lost demand, lost spending, lost tax, lost impetus. A low-tax enterprise economy, proportionately regulated, that



VIEWPOINT by MPA chief executive
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can secure the skills it needs – all of its skills, with no arbitrary distinctions on high or low – that is able to trade in key markets with fair competition and equal standards, should be our enduring aim and firm measures put in place to achieve it.

Our politicians are adept at stating obvious aspirations, consistently over-offering and under-delivering. The collective understanding of what drives demand and what enables supply, whether it is energy, food, or mineral products, is low and often breathtakingly so.

However, there are positive signs. The Construction Sector Deal which recognises the importance and role of our supply chains is welcomed, as is recognition by Government of the industry-led UK Minerals Strategy. Government is also to be commended for producing a revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which ensures the essentiality of minerals and mineral products, is accepted and is material to future release of land for extraction and added value activity. These three key developments are important in that, together, they hold out the prospect that this industry, upon which construction, as well as countless others depend, will continue to enable our schools, hospitals, homes, transport and energy infrastructure to be built, without which our quality of life would only diminish.

In these troubled times it's more critical than ever to keep our eye on the ball both despite and because of Brexit. Boosting demand by building the confidence needed for investment and innovation, and then freeing-up supply are vital to increase economic growth from current levels. The mineral products industry always stands ready to help any Government deliver its agenda for the built and natural environment. We are very much part of the solution to whatever problems are faced.

